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DE RUEHGO #0336/01 1290950
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 080950Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7519
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1145
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4692
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8233
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5795
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3664
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1552
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000336

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR USAID/OFDA, EAP/MLS, S/ES-O-CMS, DS/CC AND
DS/IP/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [E](#)[A](#)[I](#)[D](#) [B](#)[M](#)

SUBJECT: BAGO DIVISION: IT COULD BE WORSE

REF: RANGOON 335 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Southern Bago Division, among the areas that the Burmese government declared a disaster area, suffered some damage from Cyclone Nargis, although significantly less than the Irrawaddy Delta. The roads to and from Bago were clear and relatively undamaged. The city of Bago appeared normal except for a few fallen trees and damaged homes. The situation south of Bago, however, was far more severe. Prices for construction materials have tripled since the May 3 cyclone. Food, fuel, and clean water was scarce and prices continued to rise. They have not received any outside assistance. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) FOOD: On May 7, Poloff visited some areas that Cyclone Nargis affected in Bago and Rangoon Divisions. The cyclone hit the area at the time of the rice harvest in these areas and flooded most rice paddies. In an effort to salvage their crops, farmers have turned highways into areas where they can dry rice. Even four days after the storm, however, rice stocks smelled moldy and appeared brown. One woman who was spreading rice on the highway with her feet told us that the rice itself was ripe, but unless they dry it quickly, they will lose the harvest.

13. (SBU) Maykha Poultry Farm just fifteen miles east of Rangoon suffered considerable damage. Mark Eman, head of operations at the farm, estimated that his farm suffered about \$200,000 in damage and a loss of 60 to 70 percent of his chickens. Joko, another associate at the farm, showed us a barn that houses young chickens. The roof of the barn was gone and he said that even the remaining chickens will not survive unless they get better shelter. There were already bags of dead chickens stacked at the door of the barn. The farm supplies about 30 percent of chicken to Rangoon, he said, and even though prices are rising in Rangoon, he preferred that they stay lower or people will not buy it. Chicken prices have already doubled since the storm. Eman expected that things will get worse before they get better and he did not expect the situation to improve for months. He believed, however, that people are unlikely to riot as a result of food shortages. These people are too spread out and they will be too busy trying to get food on the table to riot, he said.

¶4. (SBU) FUEL: Everyone we spoke with brought up the shortage of fuel throughout the area. A few miles outside of Rangoon, fuel stations have opened to buses and taxis for the first time in several days. The line to the station was 1.5 miles long on the taxi side and 2.5 miles long on the bus side. Eman said that between May 3 and 7, diesel prices skyrocketed for his farm to 10,000 kyat (\$9) per gallon. Besides high prices, he said, people must have friends who sell diesel in order to get any. Even in Bago, which appeared normal compared to surrounding areas, the price of one gallon of gasoline was 8,500 kyat (\$7.75), about the same as it was in Rangoon. (Note: diesel prices in Rangoon have since dropped to 8,000 kyat per gallon and gasoline prices have dropped to 7,000 kyat per gallon.)

¶5. (SBU) SHELTER: Throughout southern Bago and eastern Rangoon Divisions, many people have lost their homes. Many of the homes outside of major cities consisted of bamboo poles and siding and thatched roofs, which villagers replace each year at this time in anticipation of the monsoon season. These houses sit in the middle of paddy fields, which are now flooded, and many, especially in the hardest-hit areas, completely collapsed or blew away. A few village school buildings that retained at least part of their roofs served as shelters for those who had lost their homes. These schools were extremely crowded, sometimes holding forty people in a single room.

¶6. (SBU) Piles of fresh thatch and bamboo poles were being sold on the sides of the highways as people sought to clean up and rebuild their homes. Eman told us, however, that the

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prices of these supplies were triple what they had been before the storm. The supplies that he will need to rebuild his poultry farm, such as tin roofing, plastic sheeting, and nails, also went for three times their previous rates and were more difficult to find.

¶7. (SBU) WATER: On the outskirts of Rangoon and south of Bago, the prices of bottled water rose 60 percent in the four days since the storm. Eman mentioned safe drinking water as key to ensuring that people stay healthy in the aftermath of the storm. In small villages, however, drinking water is always scarce and people generally obtain it by boiling ground water. Now with the ground water contaminated with dirt and debris, people will have a harder time providing for their drinking, cooking and sanitary needs and disease will likely spread, particularly in smaller villages. While there were no reported deaths in the area at present, he believed the death toll could rise as people become ill from waterborne disease.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The situation in southern Bago and eastern Rangoon Divisions was not as devastating as the reports coming from the Irrawaddy Delta. However, these people also need assistance to rebuild homes and businesses, feed their families, and get clean water. The GOB was nowhere in evidence providing any assistance, and they have told donors not to worry about Bago and other places along the storm track east of Rangoon. We can see the GOB has done little in Rangoon, and has barely touched the Delta. Cyclone Nargis has created many more victims than the GOB is prepared to recognize, but they do exist. End Comment.
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